

THEMATIC CONCERN IN THE POETRY OF MEENA KANDASAMI

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ABSTRACT

Post-independent English poetry written by women poets is replete with diversified themes. Women poets of this period have their own way of expressing voices that are different from the voice of pre-independence period, and this seems to be very obvious because in general it had undergone tremendous changes after the independence. The present chapter explores various themes presented in the poems of Meena Kandasami. Post-independence Indian English poetry developed as a new form of expression of Indian poets in general whereas this period also witnessed the growth of Indian women poets with their unique inimitable style of expressing their feelings in the poems.

KEYWORDS: Social Equality, Feminism & Humanism

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INTRODUCTION

Assertion of Self

Meena Kandasami persuades her women to come out of their confinement and subjection. Her poems are vehicles to strongly voice the anger of these women who have been suffering exploitation and suppression for a long time. Kandasami's poems in a way materialize her urge to resurrect the third world women and to persuade them to express their own desires, dreams, independent views and speak for themselves rather than always spoken off by patriarchal social order and their male "counterparts". Meena Kandasami's poems reveal the force with which women can create their own identity completely without support of man. The poem shows the path as to how these women can express their emotion without seeking the help of others. Meena Kandasami is a voice of a rebel supporting the cause of women's identity where "She refuse to conform to the conventional notion of the inability of the third world women to speak for themselves, to validate the propensity of the others to speak on behalf of them" (www.academia.pdu adhikari 8). Meena wants her women to come out of the traditional world of age-old confinement where they are not able to express their desires and abilities. Kandasami particularly takes on the epics in which women are ascribed with an uncorrupted, pious, and virtuous status where these women are at the disposal of man who are there "to take care" of them Kandasami in her poem "Backstreet Girls" strongly challenges the chastity forced upon these women:

Tongue united, we swallow suns.

Sure as sluts, we strip random men.

Sleepless. There's stardust on our lids.

Naked. There's self-love on our minds.

And yes, my dears, we are all friends (Ms Militancy 14)

In the last line of the poem, there is a refusal from the women to confine themselves to the archetype and they emerge with a strong sense of resistance to any kind of opposition; "There will be no blood on our bridal beds./we are not the once you will choose for wives./we are not the ones you can sentence for life ("Backstreet girls"12-14).

Feminism

Meena Kandasami's poems are about women refusing to be governed by any sort of male dominance. They are portrayed as women desiring independence; "we are not the ones you can sentence for life" ("Backstreet Girls" 13). The poem of Meena celebrates womanhood without being meek, tender, submissive and exploited; "because they had established a reputation / for being wild and unrestrained and indiscriminate / when it came to men" ("Celestial Celebrity" 1-3). Her poem presents modern woman as an empowered entity who can bring about change anywhere or desires to; "they hold the magic the magic key / to the corridors of power" (21-22). Meena's women have strong, courageous, and unusual being like the mythical goddess Kali and Durga. They can be a mother when it comes to giving love but can become Chandi. Her poems portrayed the gender-based issues prevalent in Indian society. There is an untrodden voice speaking against the private discriminatory age-old conventions that one used to subjugate women in society. Kandasami's approach is to deconstruct the western concept of feminism where true is an attempt to universalize the female expertness; her female characters are drawn from Indian literature and mythologies and are portrayed in a completely different image. She writes all my women militate. They brave bombs, they belittle kings. The lake or the sun, they take after me ("Kandasami's Introduction", *Ms Militancy* 9). Traditionally women in India are not allowed to revolt or to express anger. If they express, they are liable as hysterical this fear farcically partial or prejudices vision of patriarchal which are resulted in silencing the woman from expressing their raise and resentment towards the existing ideology is strongly challenged by the female protagonist of Kandasami's poems.

Indianness

Meena Kandasami is aware of her Indian identity culturally and socially. This identity is very much reflected in her portrayal of characters in her poems, use of Indian mythology, concerns and issues prevalent in Indian society, use of words from her own mother tongue and other Indian languages. She herself says that her writing is a process of coming closer to terms with her own identity. She takes the label of "Tamilness" with a lot of pride. She says "I wrote poetry very well aware of who I was. But I was also sure of how I wanted to be seen. I expose to the world through my writing" ("Meena kamdasami-Poems" 1). She uses the English language to make her voice heard globally but the issues, themes, and concerns are Indian and she does not hesitate to make use of Hindi or Tamil words to express her feelings. She talks of Indian mythologies and epics in her poems and refers to the *ML* Lord Krishna, Shiva, Goddess Kali, God Indra etc. Kandasami boldly uses words if she felt that those words are appropriate in conveying her feelings and messages clearly. She uses Indian mythology to draw her characters and portrayed them in her own distinctive style. The poem "Big Brother" an epic in eighteen episodes talks about the war of *Mahabharata*, "eating dirt" is about lord Krishna, eating I shall see my dark one refers to Goddess Kali, Lord Krishna, and Meerabai, "massacre" of the innocent the reference is to the God of war, Indra, the poem "Nailed" deals with the references from Indian mythology. In her very small poem, "Mokasha", she discusses the ancient Indian concept of "Dharma", "arth", and "Kam" to convey her own ideas. In this way, it can be seen that Kandasami is indebted to her Indianness and feels pride in caring for her identity of being a Tamilian and Indian.

Love and Romanticism

Kandasami depicts the feeling of love in contemporary Indian society as an expression of hypocrisy and sexuality. Love being the most harmless virtue has become completely distorted from an original sense that is i.e. selfless and pure people in the modern time male alteration in their relationship as per their convenience. The poet attracts this hypocrisy in the name of love to her poem. The poet is dejected like W.B. Yeats when she writes "it was no conclude for old men or old women". ("Why She Writes of her Love", *Ms Militancy* 60). In an interesting way, Kandasami divided modern love in the following lines:

Love, he squeeze-spliced into seven types
and threw the two crooked corners away.
It.col. grammar mapped moods on zones-
met and mate by mountains, wait within
forest, sulk in pastures, pine away close
to the coast, and desert in deserts. by order. (*Ms Militancy* 60)

The poet in her poem "Screwtiny" shows the attitude of modern young people towards love. She writes; Trust any man who is allegoric two children". Physical relation has super seeds the feelings of love; "Bound in bed and blind folded / I hear the man of words come to me" ("A Cunning Stunt" 1-2). Kandasami shows the extreme limit of hypocrisy in love where the lover wants to be in a relationship but does not want to bring that to light; "we only met in secret shielded by darkness, / he hesitates- whenever I ask him / to bring our love to light." ("Untitled Love" 2-5).

Marriage and Man Woman Relationship

Kandasami reveals the hypocrisy of men and the victimization of women in her poems. She shows irrelevance to words those men who hide behind the mask of righteousness and piety so that their weak and tented character is hidden. This hollowness of man is knocked down by the poet in her poem; "To increase the number of his sins again recoiling skin, / to drown his sorrow and his loss, to fight the knaves / who make him what he is in walks the gambler. ("Six Hours of Chastity" 19-21). Kandasami is extremely sarcastic in showing the hollowness and shamelessness of the society where men try to project themselves as holy and the insult is heaped on the woman; "After the fifth man, every woman becomes a temple." ("Six Hours of Chastity" 22). Today's woman, breaking away from the traditional Indian woman archetype, refuses to wait for her husband to come to her whenever he wishes. She stands for firm her design to choose "a random" who would be able to satisfy her. In this way, the stronghold of man in woman relationships is shared and the woman enjoys the freedom of equality in the relationship. "She picked herself a random man / for that first night of fervor." ("Random Access Man", *Ms Militancy* 460). Epitomize the status of man in the change man-woman relationship:

By the time she left
This stranger's lap
She had learnt
All about love.

First to last. ("Random Access Man", *Ms Militancy* 46)

Marriage is one of the themes in the poems of Meena Kandasami where she has her own perception about the institution of marriage and the present approach of people towards marriage. According to Kandasami, there is the birth of silence and trust among the partners in marriage. She writes; "Trust a man only after dunked / His head in buckets of freezing water. ("Screwtiny" 10-11). She further writes in the same poem; "Test -him to trust him. / Detest him to trust him. Trust a man to faith / In all forms of torture"(16-18). Marriage is a relationship between man and woman which can only be cape in two with trust, love, and mutual respect. But the modern generation, according to the poet seems to give privilege to desires, fun, and lust. Because of deteriorating moral values, the ideals of marriages have been put to ashes. Sense of mutual respect and tender feeling for the partner has gone out of the relationship of marriage. Lust has overshadowed marriage; "Denial aroused desire and / lust rolled on her breasts, / lust role her hips. ("Random Access Man" 7-9). Marriage has become an empty "hiccup" where the partner cannot be trusted; "He was not a husband / who shared his secrets. He was not a husband / who shared his spoonful either" (2-4). Such a relationship is bound to end up in calamity:

By the time she left

this stranger's lap

she had learnt

all about love.

First to last. (*Ms Militancy* 46)

Sense of Spirituality and Moral Values

Meena Kandasamy strongly unmasks the apparent morality in society as a sham. She shows that no one is without any weakness she even does not sphere Gods in her poem "Prayer to the Red Slayer" calling them as "villain" she uses strong language exposing the meanness of those who in the name of morality hide their criminal behavior and dirty beats. The poet wishes to expose such villains "the world will know your story / after you've been made landless" ("Prayers to the Red Slayer", 8-9). The poet is no mood to pardon the immoral behavior and she strongly opposes such man who projects themselves as the pure spirit but they are dipped deep in the dirty mud of lust. In her poem "Six Hours of Chastity" the poet exposes a society where a priest is found in the whore "In the darkest hour before dawn, the priest enters there, / enters her, to make love to her leftovers, fidgeting in his / Guilt and cowardice, like clinching of holy cymbals ("Six Hours of Chastity" 24-26). The poet says that one day those who are at the higher entitlement will be exposed and their position will be smashed away; "if you are ever called / to pose for the camera, or give interviews, / drop that pen and stop writing our story / as if it were your own. ("Prayer to the Red Slayer" 14-17). Meena Kandasami's love for social equality, freedom and humanism made her an activist who "seeks equality, freedom and fraternity for the marginalized so that they can lead a life with pride and dignity in society" (Mohan lal Mehto 11). Her poems are a stringent attack on the privileged social evils that are against human existence and human rights. She is extremely grieved to see the suffering of the marginalized people and women in Indian society. A poet activist awakens and that awakening is reflected in her poems that speak against inhuman treatment, humiliation, oppression, and discrimination. In her poem "Back Street Girls" she pledges for freedom for people; "We are not the ones you can sentence for life" ("Backstreet girls" 15). The heart of the poet cries for those men and women who are not considered human and are subjected to inhuman treatment and exploitation of all kinds. In her poem "One-Eyed" the poet shows how human beings fail to feel and understand the needs of their fellow human beings.

The story of 'Dharma' is of the same atrocity on the poor people where she has to give away and where she gets water at the caste of her own eye; "Dharma sees a world torn in half. / her left eyelid open but light slapped away, / prize for a task of that touchable water" (*Ms Militancy* 4). In her other poems like "Firewalker", "Dead Woman Walking", "Moon Gaizers", "Ms Militancy" etc. Meena Kandasami is able to translate her deepest pain into brilliant poems. Her spirit of humanism rises to the level of Militancy which makes her choose the characters from Indian mythology and Tamil classics and deconstruct the characters by providing them with a strong identity which is completely different from the original writings. She writes for the upliftment of the downtrodden, especially dalits and women. The purpose of her writing poems is epitomizing when she says; "I have to write poetry to be heard, I have to turn insane to stay alive" (*Ms Militancy* 8).

These women poets have treated diversified themes in their own distinguishing styles and techniques. Their portrayal has unique stamp of their individuality which has carved a special place for these women poets not only in Indian literature in English but also in world literature.

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